

Protecting Yourself from Fraud

The FTC says the best way to protect against green card lottery scams is to understand how the State Department's lottery works.

- There's no charge to enter the green card lottery. You can enter on your own at the State Department's Web site — www.dvlottery.state.gov. You'll need to answer a few questions and provide passport-style digital photographs. You'll get an acknowledgment from the State Department once you've submitted your entry.

Hiring a company or attorney to enter the lottery for you is your decision, but the person you pay will have to follow the same procedure. And your chance of being selected is the same whether you submit the entry or you pay someone to do it for you.

- Submit only one entry. If you submit more than one, you will be disqualified.
- Selection of entries is random. Spouses who are eligible for the DV lottery can apply separately; the "losing" spouse can enter the country on the Diversity Visa of the "winning" spouse. This is the only legitimate way to significantly increase your chance of entering the U.S. through the DV lottery.
- Be alert to Web sites promising government travel or residency documents online or by mail. Except for entering the DV lottery, most applications for visas, passports, green cards, and other travel and residency documents must be completed in person before an officer of the U.S. government.
- Be thoughtful about who you send your personal documents to. Unless you have an established relationship with a business, do not mail birth certificates, passports, drivers' licenses, marriage certificates, Social Security cards, or other documents with your personal identifying information to businesses promising to complete your application for travel or residency documents. These businesses may be engaged in identity theft.
- Be skeptical of Web sites posing as U.S. government sites. They may have domain names similar to government agencies, official-looking emblems (eagles, flags, or other American images like the Statue of Liberty or the U.S. Capitol), the official seals or logos of — and links to — other government sites, and list Washington, D.C., mailing addresses. If the domain name doesn't end in ".gov," it's not a government site. Bogus sites may charge for government forms. Don't pay; government forms and instructions for completing them are available from the issuing U.S. government agency for free.

For More Information

For details about the State Department's Diversity Visa lottery, visit www.dvlottery.state.gov. You also may call the State Department's Visa Services' Public Inquiries Branch at 202-663-1225. This number has recorded information with an option to speak with a visa specialist during normal business hours. Those overseas should contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

The FTC works to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or get free information on consumer issues, visit [ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov) or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. Watch a video, How to File a Complaint, at [ftc.gov/video](https://www.ftc.gov/video) to learn more. The FTC enters consumer complaints into the Consumer Sentinel Network, a secure online database and investigative tool used by hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.